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ABSTRACT

A well-conceived system of performance appraisal can indicate the conditions and circumstances motivating individual faculty members to improve their teaching. The performance appraisal system must be sensitive to the different ways in which faculty members fulfill their professional goals of teaching, research, and service. The system needs to take into account the distinctive instructional approaches of various academic disciplines. An individualized portfolio system can identify the quality and quantity of teaching and research that each discipline considers appropriate and valuable, and can eliminate the inequities of standardized rating scales. Such a system can promote the goal of continuous faculty growth and development, can help individuals and departments set both long-range and short-range goals for research as well as teaching and student learning, and can avoid the problems occurring when students evaluate teaching performance. A suggested faculty portfolio plan contains: (1) a collection of materials demonstrating what the faculty member has been doing and has accomplished; (2) a plan outlining the faculty member's goals and objectives; (3) a description of support needed to reach goals; and (4) a description of the evidence that will demonstrate that those goals have been reached. Five further readings on performance appraisal are listed. (JDD)

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# IMPROVING COLLEGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Faculty Performance Appraisal: A Recommendation for Growth and Change

Faculty want students to learn, and they believe that student learning depends heavily on their teaching. But while convincing evidence shows that faculty who add certain strategies to their teaching repertoire can increase their students' learning, most faculty don't make major changes in their teaching unless adequately motivated. We think a well-conceived system of performance appraisal is an important first step in the process of discovering what conditions and circumstances motivate individual faculty members to modify their teaching in ways that can improve learning.

### Goals for Performance Appraisal

For performance appraisal to be an effective motivator for change, we believe it must be sensitive to the different ways in which faculty members fulfill their professional goals of teaching, research, and service. If faculty are going to endorse, support, and ultimately benefit from an appraisal system, it must help them accomplish their own goals more effectively.

A single, institution-wide system may not work because disciplines use widely varying instructional approaches. An effective performance appraisal plan needs to take into account discipline and even specialty. Further, since specific institutions have different expectations for student learning, the appraisal system must be adapted to institutional differences.

### How Do Discipline and Type of Institution Affect Teaching?

Different academic disciplines have distinctive instructional approaches independent of where they are taught. For example, history is generally taught by the lecture method while business and law most often use the case method. Sciences, on the other hand, require laboratory experiences and demonstrations to teach students about basic scientific principles and methods. Mathematics classes most frequently demand that the instructor model ways of solving problems for their students. And in writing classes, effective instruction may require an instructor to create an atmosphere that will encourage students to share their work with one another and be able to accept suggestions for revision from their peers.



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Independent of the subject area, the type of institution can affect teaching. The aims of a particular course, the amount and nature of the assignments, and the kinds of examinations can be quite different in a community college and in a liberal arts college, for example.

A performance appraisal plan should consider variations in discipline and type of institution if it is going to encourage faculty to adopt the teaching approaches that can best promote their students' learning.

## How Can Differences Be Accommodated?

NCRIPTAL research suggests that an individualized portfolio system can promote the goal of continuous faculty growth and development. A portfolio system adapts performance appraisal to the needs of individuals within their own organization and involves faculty members more actively in the process. And because the portfolio process involves close interaction between individual faculty members and their peers and chairs, it increases understanding and respect for one another's work and can reduce gender and racial bias.

At the academic unit level, the portfolio system identifies the quality and quantity of teaching and research that each discipline or specialty considers appropriate and valuable. At the individual level, different expectations can eliminate the inequities of standardized rating scales and free faculty to concentrate on important activites, not just items required by a uniform quota. In this way, the portfolio process is particularly well suited for helping individuals as well as departments set both long-range and short-range goals for research as well as for teaching and student learning.

Portfolio evaluation also allows the faculty member to attend to individual personal and professional growth and development and to separate these matters from issues of merit and salary increases. Therefore, in the context of the portfolio appraisal process, rewards other than dollars can become a natural topic of discussion.

Finally, the portfolio process benefits the organization as well as the individual. A chair who knows, understands, and values the wishes and accomplishments of all department staff can plan more effectively. And realistic programmatic and institutional goals can be set with the knowledge that the staff is committed to accomplishing them.

In sum, the portfolio process satisfies the conclusions from the research literature on the effectiveness of individualized performance appraisal, and it accommodates the institution's norms, values, structures, and practices.

## Students as Performance Appraisers

Student evaluations, a typical way of evaluating teaching effectiveness, can threaten individualization in teaching. Even when faculty can select from a pool of statements that will be used to assess them, the forms discriminate. The most carefully designed instrument establishes a uniform set of standards. Such an instrument assumes that certain behaviors are good and that the absence of these behaviors constitutes proof of poor teaching. For example, nearly all evaluation forms ask students if the instructor is well organized. As a result, teachers who believe that learning is more effective when students have to create order than when the instructor provides it for them may be unfairly penalized by student rating forms. Faculty believe that they have good reasons for not making significant changes in their teaching in response to student evaluations. Consequently, student evaluations, particularly when used for merit evaluation, may not accomplish their intended purpose: the improvement of instruction and the advancement of student learning.

## A Portfolio Plan

We suggest a faculty portfolio plan that contains at least four parts. The first part would comprise a collection of materials that demonstrates what the faculty member has been doing and what she or he has accomplished in teaching, research, and service during the evaluation period. The second part would be a plan outlining the faculty member's goals and specific objectives for the next evaluation period as well as a more general explanation of plans for the long term. In part three, the faculty member would describe the kinds of support that he or she will need to reach

short- and long-term goals. The fourth part would describe the evidence that demonstrates these goals have been reached.

If faculty are to be motivated to change or modify their teaching to improve learning, the portfolio approach may represent an important step in discovering the conditions and circumstances that will facilitate that process.

Ultimately, a performance appraisal system that helps faculty members achieve their individual goals will also benefit the institution and its students and their learning. We believe that a portfolio appraisal system can promote individual personal and professional growth. Such a system could help all faculty members to realize their full potential in teaching, research, and service.

*— Kathleen Hart*

## Further Reading on Performance Appraisal


***Performance Appraisal for Faculty: Implications for Higher Education*** by Robert T. Blackburn and Judith A. Pitney (1988). Ann Arbor, MI: National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning. Technical Report No. 88-D-001.0

***Faculty as a Key Resource: A Review of the Research Literature*** by Robert T. Blackburn, Janet H. Lawrence, Steven Ross, Virginia Polk Okoloko, Jeffery P. Bieber, Rosalie Meiland, and Terry Street (1986). Ann Arbor, MI: National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning. Technical Report No. 86-D-001.0

***Gordon College Professional Development Through Growth Plans: Handbook*** by Gordon College (1988). Wenham, MA: Gordon College.

***Gordon College Professional Development Through Growth Plans: A Summary Report*** by Gordon College (1988). Wenham, MA: Gordon College.

***"A Professional Growth Offer: Too Good to Refuse"*** (1982). *Profiles* (Kellogg Foundation), vol. 5, no. 3.


This **Accent** is based on the research of Robert T. Blackburn, Judith A. Pitney, and the staff of NCRIPTAL's research program on Faculty as a Key Resource.


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